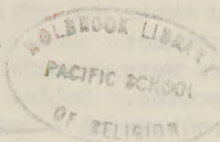


Japan Christian Activity News

No. 462, October 25, 1974

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THREE DAYS IN KOREA

by Jim Stentzel

JCAN co-editor Stentzel returned this week from a journalistic visit to South Korea where he met with church, government, press, labor, and academic people. Below, in diary form, are his notes on several religious experiences he had on three consecutive days. The Bishop Tji he refers to is Tji Hak Soun, Catholic Bishop of the Wonju Diocese, who was given a 15-year prison term in August. George Ogle, 45, is an American missionary (and Methodist minister) who has served in Korea since 1954. The "People's Revolutionary Party" (PRP), according to the ROK government, is a communist group whose members were planning a violent overthrow of the government last April. The Korean Student Christian Federation (KSCF) is a long-standing Christian student group whose office had been shut down since the mass arrests of students in early April. Twenty KSCF students, three national staff members, and three KSCF supporters are now serving prison terms ranging from seven to 20 years. ---eds

Wednesday, October 9: A beautiful, clear fall day--and a national holiday--in Seoul. The Pope himself couldn't have hoped for a better day to celebrate the beginning of a special Catholic Holy Year. Some 20,000 Korean Catholics from all over South Korea gathered for an outdoor mass to kick off the once-every-25-years emphasis. The 2 1/2 hour mass included a sermon which was surprisingly blunt--for a Korean in public--about the plight of hundreds of political prisoners in this country.

I was preparing to leave about 4:30 when a South Korean flag, several banners and a dozen signs suddenly sprouted like fall flowers from the priestly recession. A friend explained that the signs all said "Release Bishop Tji". Before I knew it, I was caught in the middle of one of the largest anti-government demonstrations in Korea in 10 years. Five bishops, some 100 priests, 300 nuns, 50 seminary students and 3,000 lay Catholics willingly followed the signs. Thousands of others looked on. Some looked shocked, and many other faces showed fear. The group was marching out of the Catholic seminary toward the street, singing hymns as they went.

Near the street, however, about two dozen plainclothes policemen hurriedly closed the heavy iron gate. The procession halted for a moment, then an equal number of priests in their colorful robes took hold of their side of the gate and overpowered the policemen after several coordinated heave-hos. A loud cheer erupted from the heretofore solemn columns. But one step outside and the first of some 800 helmeted riot policemen rushed in from the street. The marchers were halted only five meters past the gate. Brief scuffles ensued in which the police smashed some of the signs. Some foreign priests broke through the first police cordon only to find themselves isolated from their Korean brethren. It was a stand-off for two hours, during which ringing hymns were interspersed with slogans: restore democracy, stop repression, free the prisoners, restore basic

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EDITORS:

Subscriptions: JAPAN ¥1,500; OVERSEAS Airmail \$ 8.00, Seamail \$6.00

John Nakajima, Jim Stentzel, Lee Seaman

NATIONAL CHRISTIAN COUNCIL Room 24, 551 Totsuka-machi 1-chome, Shinjuku-ku, Tokyo 160 Japan

human rights, help laborers and poor people, restore freedom of speech.

I was struck by their numbers, their vigor, their unity and their dignity under the circumstances. And I was struck by the gravity of the occasion when, as the demonstrators were dispersing at dusk, many stopped to sing more hymns at a nearby intersection. Police trucks rolled up and tear-gas guns began spewing forth the government's brand of communion wine, sending the last several hundred worshippers scurrying back to homes throughout the south.

Thursday, October 10: I raced to get to the Christian Building by 10 a.m., only to discover that the prayer meeting was beginning "on Korean time", 15 minutes later than scheduled. The small room was packed. Ham Suk Hon, the white-haired "Mahatma Gandhi of Korea," looking as majestic as he is wise, sat among a dozen or so rather well-dressed mothers and wives of imprisoned Christians. I stood alongside several plainly dressed women with ruddy complexions. A missionary explained that they were wives of alleged "PRP communists", six of whom have been sentenced to death. None of the women are Christian, yet they come because the community shares their pain and struggle.

Rev. Yun, a Presbyterian minister, stood up to announce that the meeting was about to begin, but that first he wanted to advise the participants: "For my prayer last week, I was harshly interrogated by the (Korean) CIA. If anyone here is not willing to risk similar treatment, perhaps he or she should leave now." No one among the 40 present moved, and the service began.

I missed at least 80 percent of what was being said, but was gripped by the profound depths of emotion in the prayers, most of which concerned the some 200 men imprisoned this year for their political, religious and social concerns. Coming from Japan, I tried hard to fight back my tears--and not to blow my nose in public!--until I noticed that nearly everyone else in the room was in tears. A wave of inspiration--of judgement and redemption--swent through my body. I was no longer an American, from Japan, passing through Korea. I prayed like I haven't prayed in years. The prisoners' bondage, and their families' suffering, became mine--became ours--in a prayer of confession that rose from our collective souls. But I should not imply that my encrusted soul took flight in some ecstasy-fantasy. What happened to all of us this morning was very earth-bound: a physical and spiritual rising, standing up to say, "Yes, Lord, we rise to your occasions with our feet firmly planted. Despite our fear, we know your purposes."

George Ogle gave the sermon (in Korean) using Matthew 25:34-40. He mentioned well-known Koreans who have suffered and some who have died in the struggle for justice, saying that such men symbolize Christ's incarnation. But he argued that Christians have not shown much awareness or concern for lesser known men who also symbolize the incarnation: particularly the alleged members of the PRP who had committed no crimes worthy of the death sentence. He said that these men are experiencing more suffering and greater injustice than many of the well-prayed-for Christians in prison, and he pleaded for Christian love and compassion for all of God's children.

After several more resounding hymns and prayers, the minister who had been picked up the week before talked about his experience with the CIA. Since there were no aisles, nobody could roll in them, but his account was utterly hilarious. He's a short, squat man, and he illustrated how he had stood firm, tried to stand tall and put up his fists every time a 6-foot-tall, 200-pound CIA man threatened to beat him into confessing the "error" of his prayer. His faith and courage then were matched only by his daring to come and tell his story today.

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Afterward I met Ms. Lee Woo Jung, head of Korean Church Women United. She too, in the midst of filling me in on the utter seriousness of her own CIA interrogations and prison experiences, was able to laugh at some of the ridiculousness of the government's rule. One story concerned how early this year she had worked hard to organize CWU groups to boycott Hitachi products (because of the discrimination case against a Korean in Japan). A CIA man threatened her, forcing her to promise to stop her "anti-Japanese protest". Then, in August, when the ROK government helped organize and fund anti-Japanese riots in Seoul (because a Korean in Japan had allegedly killed the President's wife), another CIA man visited Ms. Lee. He demanded to know why CWU wasn't supporting these demonstrations. She calmly explained that she was a woman of her word and mentioned the promise she had given to the other CIA man. Devastated, the agent went away without saying another word.

Friday, October 11: For several weeks the Board of Directors of KSCF have been planning a prayer service for prisoners. It was to be the first major KSCF meeting in more than six months since police cracked down on the committed young Christians. The CIA heard of the plans and threatened to stop it. When 2000 postcards were ordered announcing the meeting, the CIA stopped the printer from doing the job. Word of mouth was used to announce the evening prayer service, and no one knew if more than 20 people would show up.

But tonight more than 200 people--some 175 students, 13 relatives of imprisoned students and an estimated dozen CIA agents--met and prayed up a storm in the Christian Building. For the second time in two days I was moved to tears, first by a prayer by the mother of two student-prisoners, then by a prayer from one of the few released prisoners. The sermon brought Mark 10:32-34 to powerful life. It made all the feelings in the room--amazement, fear, oppression, death and new life--unbelievably real. As on yesterday, I was amazed, strengthened and encouraged by the depths of courage and faith that motivate these people. With new eyes I could see the beauty amidst pain, the affirmations of life in the face of death, that these Christians carry in their struggle to be free men and women. There is something about this Korean Christianity, the likes of which I have never experienced in the U.S. or Japan. Life is brought to worship, and worship to life, all with extraordinary integrity to the Gospel.

As I left the building I felt drained and yet filled. I passed two of the CIA men who are on permanent assignment at the Christian center. Outside, I passed three buses of riot police who were wondering: if the Catholics can do it, why not the Protestants? Then first word came that George Ogle had been picked up and taken to CIA headquarters for interrogation. Later I heard that Rev. Park, a Presbyterian minister who also prayed yesterday, had also been taken in.

(Note: Both men were released the next morning. Ogle was held for 19 hours, including two hours of sleep. An unknown CIA agent at the Thursday prayer meeting had transcribed Ogle's sermon. Ogle was told that Christians shouldn't show concern for "proven communists", and he was forced to sign a pledge that he would never again refer to the PRP in a sermon. He was lectured on where the government draws the line between religion and politics. And once more a humorous note in the midst of a terrifying experience: After an agent read the CIA sermon transcript to Ogle, Ogle told him he had done a very good job and invited him to preach at his church some time. The agent didn't laugh.)

The Preparation Committee decided in the final moments of its Oct. 14-15 meeting to hold the 18th General Assembly of the United Church of Christ in Japan on Dec. 10-13 at Kowakien Hotel.

The Assembly will continue the dialog format that characterized the 17th Assembly held at the same site in November of 1973 but will also conduct the election of members for the executive committee, which was not accomplished by last year's Assembly, and the election of officers.

The Kyodan is attempting to get back on the track of biennial assemblies after having been derailed by the controversy over the Christian Pavilion at Expo '70, the spark that ignited other issues.

In announcing the Assembly, Moderator Isuke Toda acknowledged that some people believe it is too early to hold the Assembly, in view of the fact that two districts--Tokyo and Osaka--are not yet in a position to hold their annual assemblies and elect delegates. However, Toda said, there is real need to hold the Assembly as soon as possible, and the committee believes it may in fact make some contribution to the convening of the assemblies in the two districts.

The 18th Assembly will have, in place of duly elected representatives from the Tokyo and Osaka districts, persons selected to represent opposing positions on key issues.

The three topics to be debated are: the meaning of the Kyodan's participation in the Christian Pavilion at Expo '70 in the context of mission and the process of making such decisions; circumstances surrounding the calling of police into the campus of Tokyo Union Theological Seminary to remove barriers erected by student protestors and the lawsuit instituted by TUTS against students accused of legal offenses during the period of entrance examinations and the basis of, and process for, determining the qualifications of ministers for ordination.

Commenting on the significance of the approach being sought throughout the Assembly planning, Toda said, "We desire to move toward unity through dialog not to create divisions, not to drive anyone out."

* * * * *

MISCELLANEOUS NEWS

Juntaro Ueda, secretary of the Japan Committee of the International Christian Youth Exchange (ICYE), is the new world chairman. Participants at the recent ICYE General Assembly in Walberberg, Germany, elected Ueda to chair the organization for the next two years.

The Japan Committee sends 17 young people on its one-year program and receives 14 participants from overseas. One-third of these exchanges are with other Asian countries.

* * * * *

Buddhist, Protestant and Catholic scholars met recently under the auspices of the Japan Society of Christian Studies to discuss "The Human Problem---Original Sin and Human Actions".

The meeting, held October 10-11 at St. Paul's University (Rikkyo) in Tokyo, featured a panel discussion of differing Buddhist and Christian views of individual human sin and its relation to problems in the modern world. "Christians believe that sin results from weakness. It is a personal separation from God," summarized one participant, "Buddhists have no single entity as God, so sin is seen differently, too." * * * *

Dialogue at meetings was at first limited to Protestants, with a recent move towards ecumenicism as more Catholic theologians have participated. This meeting was to have marked the first appearance of a Buddhist scholar at a Society panel discussion. However, confusion over dates unfortunately prevented full participation by Professor Koshio Tamaki of Tokyo University.

* * * * *

A Noh performance of "The Apostle Paul" will be given by the Kita Noh School at 2:00 p.m. on Saturday, November 2 at the Nohgakudo at Suidobashi, Tokyo.

The performance will commemorate the premier performance ten years ago. The play centers on Paul's experience on the road to Damascus.

Tickets range from ¥1000 to ¥3500. Telephone 491-7773.

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Headline-Making Events

compiled by C. Koriyama

SATO GETS PEACE PRIZE---The presentation of a Nobel Peace Prize to former Japanese prime minister Eisaku Sato has plunged Japanese people into a whirlpool of confusion. Although Sato has stated that he received the prize "as a representative of the Japanese people," many here question the suitability of this representation.

Since Sato has been called "the do-nothing politician," some comment, perhaps it can be said that he took no military action, either ... perhaps. Especially in the once war-torn North Pacific, there has been no trouble for almost thirty years ...

MITSUMI CO. BOMBED---A time bomb exploded at the head office of Mitsui Trading Company in downtown Tokyo on October 14, sixteen persons were injured, including five policemen searching the building after anonymous calls about a planted bomb.

Mitsui is one of the largest companies in Japan. Another mammoth, Mitsubishi Heavy Industries, Ltd., was bombed on August 30 and eight people died.

Meanwhile, prank calls are plaguing Tokyo businesses. Since August 30, over 180 bomb-threat calls (without accompanying bombs) have been reported by companies here.

THALIDOMIDE BABIES---Fifteen years after the birth of the first thalidomide babies in Japan and eleven years after the first families took their case to the courts, the Ministry of Health and Welfare and Dai Nihon Seiyaku (the company which marketed thalidomide in Japan) have signed a final out-of-court agreement to pay over six billion yen to families of the affected children. The agreement included families who did not participate in the suit.

The children range from eleven to fifteen years old now, and they are thinking about their future. "They say we should build two or three centers with the money," said one girl. "But what good will that do us?" Another asked, "If they can invent medicine that makes my arms short, why can't they find something that will make them long again?"

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MUTSU RETURNS----Aomori fishermen have permitted the Mutsu, Japan's first nuclear-powered ship, to re-enter its home port after a 50-day "block-out". Fishermen, who had used their small boats and sandbags to block the ship's exit and later its return, ended their blockade when the government agreed to pay over ¥1000 million in compensation and to find another home port for the Mutsu within six months.

Opposition forces have long held that the possibility of radioactive contamination poses a threat to the value of Mutsu Bay scallops, one of two thriving industries in the economically backward area. These arguments gained strength when the Mutsu, which left its home port on August 26 for a test run, developed a radiation leak.

The story of the Mutsu and the city for which it is named strikes an ironic note, for Mutsu City and Aomori Prefecture at first eagerly accepted the Government's proposal to build a nuclear port in the bay. The project was to bring new economic life to the underdeveloped area, which is so poor that many husbands leave their families for half a year at a time to work as construction workers in the large cities on Japan's east coast.

In thanks to the people of the area, the Government directed extra funds into the promotion of the fishing industry. Due to this research, fishermen have recently achieved self-sufficiency. The scallop catch has jumped in value from ¥200 million to ¥10,000 million, fishermen have put away their shovels and picks and gone back to their boats, and no one wants to endanger their new-found prosperity.

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CHINA FLIGHTS----Two years after the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and China, direct commercial flights between the two countries by Japan Airlines and the flag-carrier of the People's Republic of China, CACC, began here September 29. Perhaps this marks the opening of a Chinese window on the Pacific???